

New Zealand ends lockdown after deciding outbreak contained

February 17 2021, by Nick Perry



New Zealand's Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern, center, and Director-General of Health Ashley Bloomfield, right, talk to media in Wellington, New Zealand Monday, Feb. 15, 2021. As people in Auckland adjusted to a new lockdown on Monday, health officials said they'd found no evidence the coronavirus had spread further in the community, raising hopes the restrictions might be short-lived. (AP Photo/Nick Perry)

A lockdown in the New Zealand city of Auckland will end at midnight, the government announced Wednesday after concluding a coronavirus outbreak had been contained.

"This is good news," Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said.

The nation's largest city was put into [lockdown](#) on Sunday after three unexplained cases were found in the community. It was the first lockdown in six months in a nation which so far has managed to successfully stamp out the spread of the disease.

The move to end the lockdown came as [health authorities](#) said the outbreak had grown by three cases to six in total. But Ardern said the additional cases were to be expected because they involved close contacts.

Ramped-up testing indicates the outbreak hasn't spread far. Laboratories processed more than 17,000 individual tests on Tuesday, authorities said, and they also tested wastewater samples, which came back negative.

"What this tells us is that we don't have a widespread outbreak, but rather a small chain of transmission which is manageable by our normal contact-tracing and testing procedures," Ardern said.

The initial cases were a mother, a father, and their 13-year-old daughter, who attends a local high school. Health authorities said the three new cases were a high school classmate, who was a close contact of the daughter, and two family members of the classmate.

Senior lawmakers in the Cabinet who met Wednesday afternoon decided most Aucklanders could go back to work and [school](#) from Thursday, but they would still leave some restrictions in place until at least Monday.

Genome testing has shown the family caught a more contagious variant first found in Britain.

The mother who caught the disease works at a catering company that does laundry for airlines. Officials have been investigating whether there is any link to infected passengers, but so far haven't been able to find a direct connection or explain how the [outbreak](#) might have begun.

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